Eris Temple: New & Selected Poems 2007-2018

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OPERA BUFA (2007)

#1

Losing is the lugubriousness of Chopin. What's lost might be a sea shell or a tea cup or the bloody scalp of an Indian; it hardly matters. When you are lost, the heart recedes from exterior currents, too much in sync with itself, its groove vicissitudes. Each encounter, rather than revealing new rhythms, is experienced as a clangorous din, a pounding. The effect of this pounding is to push the heart deeper and deeper into pitiless darkness. The darkness is pitiless because it has no clear ending. The rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began. We find pity and it betrays us with a stray fondle. We squirm within ourselves to the sound of the Devil's opera bufa.

#7

If you were a yellow balloon in tall leaning trees, I'd be a girl in purple impaled between pillars. If you were a cup of finished ice cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon-goddess. Is the human heart a Parisian kitchen? Are lamb-chops better than avarice? Are you churned like butter from Dantescan depths? Am I warm and willful as a shop-girl's thighs, stuck with grasses to a farmer's boots? Lunatics hover on branches, pushing me down into sleep; swans at the window, watching hail fall in diagonal darts. Your railings border me, yet toss my words up into gleaming squares. Priests look back and forth, veiny hands. Shadows strike the angels from their perch. Somewhere inside is a reference.

#13

O, for the strength to strip a stripper. Isn't that wanted by the forces swirling in eddies around the Delaware? Isn't that what becomes material? Not if you think one night can be micro, macro, all kinds of crows. Not if what you really want is to pick at my liver. Let's face it, you were never more than a soul-pygmy. You were a soul-gypsy by yourself, to yourself. We learn as life elongates that personal feelings about persons are not important. We learn that we are all pygmies. Your failure was in measuring yourself against ants, as if a beam and a magnifying glass could cure you. You should be so lucky.

#38

I was a cadaver in a copse until a cop arrested me. I was a convict in a jumpsuit until I jumped bail. I was a hitchhiker under galactic moon dust until I saw the sun. I was the sun as it rose and I shone on my dead self. I was a copse under the sun. I was a convict and a copse. I was all of this until I learned that you are what you see. I was what I saw until I saw that my eyes were shut. I opened my eyes to a kind of vacancy. I opened my arms to delinquency. I do not see anything now, and it rings.

#43

There was a girl on a hill. She was shrouded by a wash of shadow. In the background, a steeple peeked through blue. There were clotted sky-arteries. Light was moving on the hill and on the girl. She remained fixed. A sound like thunder made jarring waves. She was facing me. I was floating above a different hill. The picture before me was like a face. The girl knelt where a mouth should've been.

#50

You spent forty-seven poems looking for me, Maria says. *You were talking in expansive, fluorescent, Crayola circles.* All I can say is, I remember poundings and baseball cards and tons of bricks. I remember daftness and deftness disappearing. I remember gum, bruises, abusing ice cubes. I know that I had to dream an opera to really sing. I know I had to dream singing to really write. As for fluorescence, those crayons were always my favorites anyway. If the color is off, it's because my set collapsed, if not into nullity, then into plurality. I remember a city and a story. I am many stories up.

#56

Ms. Props, jealous, wants to know about Maria. She, too, wants a ton of bricks. A song pops into my head, just a germ, and I know that another opera is beginning, as night bleeds into dawn. *Never you mind*, I say, *you are as pain-worthy as she, as precious in your meddling, as diligent in your scavenger hunt*. I feel a C chord changing to E minor, then an A minor changing to G, and I realize what Eternal Return means. It means that every fresh breath of life plants seeds that must die. It means that the death of music is the birth of tragedy that must be expressed musically. It means all this fooling around must be paid for in the oven of creation. Every kiss must be minted.

#60

I can think of no afterthought. I can only say: *here I have been*. Music must bleed: let it. It will bleed into more and more of itself. It will spontaneously regenerate, nimble as an ice-walking fox in a blasted landscape. It will care for itself. I fall back like an exhausted lover, spent and famished. I am a cactus tree, full and hollow. I am one.

BEAMS (2007)

Solipsist

are you serious, fucking

bent over bars, malt heavens
bubbles bumping bed-posts, breakage

sweating mug, street-lake sea-shells
last night around yr waist

you're knotted, not what you did
pressed to the city's dry ice

deep down the throat of a solipsist

Loose Canon

shots ricocheted at borders

coated walls absorbed friction-lit brigades
sensitive machines registered red hits

sleep fell on specifics regardless
universals fried sausages

not much could be spoken of remorse

second skirmish sent forces scattering
shards of green glass littered forest floors

irreplaceable antiques wiped their eyes
on the cuffs of the loosest canon

I didn't expect immolation to arrive so soon

Whiskey

Balance, easily sought, is hardly attained;
no sooner are we aloft than we're

buried beneath snow-drifts; grace follows damn-
nation, damnation follows grace, & whiskey

soaked evenings are always a possibility.
In fact, it's here that Li Po forged

whatever stealth was his, in the first buzz
of drunkenness. I follow him, rattled, jarred,

& stymied by the world's cries, & my own,
& soon I sit amid piles on both sides—

exultations, horrors, amassed like so many
stamps, low-priced, out of date.

debbie jaffe

& that i must caesar. arms, curd
went down. found, mice, shelf, armor
machine. wasp it up, & up, & up, real
member a machine. then, head, shot,
“she said”, she said. feel, linger, can’t.
belly, caesar, belly. debit, giraffe, red-
headed. purge to null, urge, two, pull.
eye, belly, belie. ( )

Becky Grace

It's woven into her, that polo
shirt. She might even fuck w/ it.
Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but
just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz".
Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing
implying discrete boundaries.
Becky isn't bounded, or has
boundlessness woven into her…

Polo shirts are what they are,
remain so. If I say "objective
correlative", I bring string into it,
so that Becky might be
strung up. I don't deny a "literal"
element, or that Becky might stay in.
All I mean is, between "us", there's
"more-than-us". That's what I'm
"getting at"; it's woven into me

WHEN YOU BIT… (2008)

Big Black Car

Your middle: tongue
(hers), man (me), riding
together, I bitch (middle's
middle). I tongue man
you, her, spacious, it, of
you, all of us, can't feel
a nothing, I can't. Not
of this, of you, of her,
of all of this riding, in
what looks big, black,
has tongue-room. I
can't feel a thing. I feel
nothing of bigness, black
fur interior her you. Ride.

Back of a Car

Asinine, as is, this ass is:
ass I zip down into zero:
anal, a null, a void, this is.
I'm behind a behind that
sits smoking, rubbing, pink-
tipped, tender, butt, button.
She watches me watching as
I go brown-nose in another.
Only *her car-ness*, averted by
eyes to a wall, seems happy.
Only she can stomach rubs
of the kind that want plugs.
Sparked tank, here comes
no come, & aggravation.

Cocaine Gums

I ache: dull, sharp,
in a heap of paper.
All paper: picture,
bright, bold, dark.
I have nailed you
to a piece: black.
I darken touched
things: I'm used.
I write you, you,
you, as if kissed
by a fresh body,
rose-petal bliss.
I drowse: numb
as cocaine gums.

Framed

Nailed, two, across— I
have been glimpsing me
from above, as a camera
would, I am a still, this
is a film, this has to be
framed, no, don't hold,
I can't, it's an offstage
arm, both you & you
speak like I'm (so) not
here, I'm celluloid, I'm
varicose, vein-soft, fake-
bloody, cut, I can't move,
you & you & I minted,
taped, uncensored, dead.

Dark Lady

You're more of a Dark Lady
than I have ever hoped for,
especially because when you
betray me, it's with someone
I love: me.
You're more of
everything, actually, & you're
also a pain in the ass. That's
why I haven't let you off the
hook. I'll wind up in my own
hands again tonight, sans
metaphors, like your full
moon in my face, but you'll
never know there's a man in you.

Deodorant Redolence

Rage is senseless, I rage
in a cloud of senselessness
against the confines of a
first layer of rage against
the confines of a region
of loneliness buttressed
by a feeling that deodorant
is an insult against redolence
that I haven't guts to embrace.
I shower every morning, I
even bathe after I shower,
what this has to do with
anything is beyond me,
except that I like your dirt.

Stomach Flu

It's like, I have a virus
in my guts that forces
me to puke you up every
time I eat anything tasty.
I puke, shaking through.
I know what I need to do—
stop cigarettes & coffee &
booze & toffee & all things
that seem excremental
when lust for life has gone
rusty. Your increased bust
has made me allergic to
cherry flavored colas, syrups,
brandy, candy fits, & shit.

Screw

I want you to be like a bull.
I want you to call me a fool.
I want to be ass-proud for you.
I want you to call me to screw.
I know this iambic is dry.
I know this excess has to stop.
I know I can laughably cry.
I know blood can come drop by drop.
I come for you kicking my ass.
I've come to be making a pass.
I've come undistracted by "I".
I killed off my "I" as it's dry.
I start off these lines in the sand.
I want to end up in your hand.

CHIMES (2009)

#1

I remember chimes. They were a swirl and eddy above a yellow door. Swaying happened and a noise and a rocking of wind; I was alive to light. I did not say, but was; I was not is, but being. There was a window opposite that was a rectangle and a flood of blue. Light was piercing it in beams and it was a movement and a lingering. I noticed the music of things, even then. I noticed that there was music not only in the chimes but in colors set against one another, yellow and blue and the white arms of the crib and in a moment I could taste them all together. I experienced moments as a kind of eating: I was hungry and I did.

#3

Tookany Creek shone of moonlight lavished on it from a sky that stretched over our big backyard. I stood at the window and it was late and I looked at the creek and it was a kind of song. I thought it was a dream and I thought that this was dreaming but I stayed there at the window and there was a shed in the backyard, it was blue like our house, but with white shutters and it was there for no purpose but as something between me and the stream that shone white and black from the moon. I stood at a level with my window and the stream made a rushing rustling noise and it was speaking to me and I listened.

#7

Our house on Mill Road was a two-story wooden twin painted sky blue, placed on a curving block on the bottom of a steep hill, and was itself on an incline. The wide backyard, where was a large wooden shed also painted sky blue, and which fed onto a gravel path and then down another incline into Tookany Creek, was set sharply lower than the front door and then Mill Road beyond it, while across the street shone the side face of another hill, on which began the houses on Harrison Avenue. The effect of this portion of Mill Road was seclusion, intimacy, and rusticity— it looked very much like a nineteenth, rather than a twentieth century innovation. The moon above Mill Road was secluded along with us, coaxed into a space privatized by immersion in a world apart from the rest of Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township, Philadelphia, and the wider world. That emotion, of being apart from things, was blended into harmony or moodiness, exultation or melancholy, by the song of the creek and its currents. Though my block eventually intersected with Church Road, where there was more worldliness, traffic, and a general sense of movement, what echoed in me on Mill Road was a way of being alone, of being private. I had no siblings. No surprise that the house was haunted by strange ghosts, strange ghosts and echoes. I awoke once covered in spiders and they were dancing and I couldn't get them off. Also a big round white light came into my second floor window, it shone there and dazzled me and screamed and my Father told me it was a police searchlight and I believed him but he was wrong. I can see the light today and what it was doing was charging me and I was being prepared to serve in a kind of army and I am serving in a kind of army now: the light knew. I screamed out of pained recognition when I saw it and that was a spirit that haunted the house. Other echoes shone off the surface of Tookany Creek, which soothed but was itself of another world that was faraway and deep and that I couldn't reach even when I waded in it.

#9

O what does the music mean but not mean when you are so small that you have no defense against it? Riding in a car and a voice said *touch if you will my stomach, see how it trembles inside*, and it was strange but more violent than a body of water, even one that moved, and the voice was of me but not yet, because there was something in the voice that knew me (and anticipated me) without me knowing it, and it was a voice that danced and it meant heat hot heat hot heat.

#10

I was in the bathtub and I said my name over and over again until I forgot myself. The lights in the bathroom were on but I went deeper and deeper into darkness, and an empty void, and I heard my name as a something foreign. I heard my name, and I truly was not, I was a null and a void, null and void, and I had no self to be. Then, slowly, I regained myself, but I did not forget the essential emptiness, the uncompromising NO that I found behind the quotidian YES of selfhood. This happened also riding in a car to Aunt Libby's, and listening to the radio I thought NOTHING ANYWHERE until NOTHING got so big I shut my mind down in fright, and my consciousness streamed mellower.

#15

O, for American summers of ice cream, basketballs, hot dogs, softball fields. On three special weekends a summer, day camp became sleepaway camp, before I had been to sleepaway camp. We sat on picnic tables on Friday afternoons, after the rest of the camp had departed, waiting for the fun to begin, and our sleeping bags had been deposited in the Rec Hall. It was in the air then for me, and on the sunny Saturday mornings that followed: a sense of absolute, boundless freedom. Looking out over the fields, the archery range, the equipment shed, and back up to the rock path at the foot of the Rec Hall's steps, the day glistened inside and around us, a feast of gracious gifts. If we could inveigle a counselor to supervise, we could use the swimming pool, maybe (if he or she were mellow enough) for hours. The pool itself was up and around the corner from the Big Top pavilion, where the other counselors fired up tunes on their boom-boxes and gossiped about the night before, less ecstatic than us to be here in Norristown. Many times, I claimed the equipment shed as a personal fiefdom, so as to organize massive, junior-professional softball games. Everything was trundled out to one of the two fields which was separated only by a wire fence from narrow, curvy Yost Road, and more empty fields on the other side of it, which I often stared at, entranced at a young age by nature spirits without being consciously aware of it. Counselors played with us, including CITs (Counselors-in-Training), and the context required us to cut heads— if you weren't good enough, you couldn't play. Later, down all the fields I ran, shirt tucked into shorts, playing capture the flag. Or, there I sat at the campfire, being told scary stories, feeling the magic of a small clan huddled, marshmallow soft (as the smores we cooked) in that realm: *camp*. Eventually I discovered sex, my sex, through the knowledge of a little girl who saw a big man in me. She held my hand and kissed me, and it was a deep wave of knowledge that left forever aftershocks rattling my walls with fire and thrill, frisson. Those lips were tender, were fevered, were forever cleaved to me in my imagination after that one night outside the Dining Hall, which was suddenly far away as Neptune. There was a brooding and a bittersweet and a knowledge of what can be achieved when two poles of being meet in the middle to kindle sparks. I held on to it.

#21

For a long time there was no sound that was my sound. Then one night, I was at my father's house, which was not Old Farm Road. Glenside, this Glenside, was posh, luxuriant. On the radio I heard a sound that I knew instinctively was my sound. It was resonant, sharp, and had echo; it sent reverberations out to the four corners of the earth; it would not be denied. The music began with a short phrase, a riff, played on a hugely fuzzed electric guitar. The riff, allowed to reverberate and fill a large, studio-generated aural landscape, was a thunderbolt shot down from Olympus. It tugged, as baseball did, at everything in me which was masculine, courageous, outrageous even, daring. When a human voice was heard, filtered in, intoning a harsh reprieve to an errant muse (*You need coolin', baby I'm not foolin'*), it could be heard as vibrantly raw or merely shrill, singing in a very high register. My own consciousness perceived nothing but the vibrancy of power: extreme, uncompromising volatility and nerviness. The drums filled out an expansively drawn landscape with even more authority, as though a tribunal of Greek gods had converged and were sending secret messages to me in Glenside, ensconced with headphones while my father watched TV impassively across the room. When the guitar spoke for itself, above the fray and accented by space made for it, it was a form of blues made sophisticated beyond blues I was familiar with: all the agony and bravado of blues guitar pushed into a space where more eloquence was required, to achieve a necessary release past overwhelming tension. The cascades of notes were not just a release: they were a hint and a missive sent to me about the possibility of ecstasy on earth, achieved nirvana, release from karmic wheels. The aural landscape was rocky, mountainous, and allowed the listener to climb from peak to peak with it. In short, it was a place I'd never seen, a miraculous place, with landslides clanging over other landslides so that no stasis or silence need be tolerated. I had to merge with the landscape, join it, become it. I would not be able to sit still unless I became one with this sound, until I could similarly reverberate. I needed to reach the four corners, the mountain peaks, along with it. This sound that began with a loud guitar, played hotly, showed me the world seen through an auditory prism of light and shade.

#30

My entire childhood, I enjoyed the stillness of houses in the middle of the night, when everyone was asleep. There was comfort there— everyone was still around— but also, as I discovered, a sense of freedom, invisible in the daytime. Consciousness became more fluid; perceptions widened; and all kinds of receptive sensitivity sharpened and honed themselves. The house in Mahopac where I had relatives was unassuming; yet I was sometimes able to tune in to a wavelength frequency there about oneness, states of unity, a sense of indissoluble bonds fastening together the perceptible world. One night, me and a bunch of other kids were asked to sleep in my cousin Camilla's wood-floored, white-paneled, rectangular bedroom. Camilla had a fish-tank I hadn't noticed much, set against the far wall, next to the raw, grained wooden door. I woke randomly in the middle of the night, while the rest of the house slept— set on a mattress with another girl-child I didn't know much, next to Camilla and her friend sprawled on the bed beneath a white comforter, elevated above us. At first, I was slightly irritated. But as I watched the fish swim around the tank, and listened to the mild hum the fish-tank made, I was not only mollified, I was entranced. The hum and the movement of the fish became a dynamo, a manifestation-in-motion of perfect peace, of a state of being completely covered by nourishing waters. I didn't sleep much the rest of the night. I was somehow able to rivet myself to paying rapt attention to a kind of symphony, being performed specially for me. The crescendo of the symphony transpired just as the dawn began to break. The stillness of the house ricocheted against the hum of the tank and the moving fish until I reached the apex of consciousness my young mind could reach. I was completely safe, yet completely free nonetheless. I dreaded the thought that anyone in the house would move. As had to be tolerated, the sun manifested, and feet began to shuffle in the hallway, breaking the magic spell. But Mahopac had an uncanny clarity for me of allowing moments like this to happen. I thought of these things, as I was riding in a train to Mahopac to visit my relatives. It was an endless classic day in the endless classic summer of '89. The train broke down and I was sequestered in it for hours, again slightly irritated at first. There was no one in my car; I took out my guitar and began to play. I had a sensation of Otherness from being in an unfamiliar place, a place strictly liminal. I learned for the first time, there and then, the magic of places that were not my home, were not destinations, and were in the middle of something. Though I couldn't feel the sunlight directly, there was warmth and a charm to the circumstances that I appreciated. It was the Mahopac wavelength frequency again. Travel could help me to channel; Otherness could rejuvenate one's interior world; mishaps could be gateways to other realities.

#41

That year, N wrote a long letter in my yearbook, that ended with *I love you*. I could sense, even then, that this *I love you* came from a much different place than other kids' effusions; this was a bittersweet testimony, not to placid or innocent attachment, but to strife, hardship, misunderstanding, piercing ecstasies and equally piercing sorrows. It was from an artist to an artist; it bore the stamp of aesthetic appreciation. N had reached down into the depths of her soul and her words had the weight of big breakers. I felt them land on me even as I tried to avert them. Yet, outwardly, we still wrestled; attaching, detaching, attaching again. What we wanted was freshness all the time, and each seemingly permanent detachment made coming together again more piquant. Something in N's actual name— Niven Cammett— was very tender for her. At school, she liked to lean on nicknames and pet names. I was destined to find out why. One weekend night, towards the end of eighth grade, and when Ted happened not to be around, we had been on the phone for hours as usual. I made a joke about the name "Cammett," and it having to do with something which was true about N— she liked the idea of films and filming, and frequently alluded to incidents at school which, justly, should've been filmed. Thus, if you want something documented, "Cammett." N started to cry. She didn't blubber, but it was easy to hear that tears were being shed. I was solicitous, of course, but I understood that this wouldn't be an easy one. After several minutes of hemming and hawing, N astonished the hell out of me and said, "Adam, I'm going to tell you this once. I was adopted, alright? This family, the Cammetts, are not my real family. My real family are out on the West Coast, in California. When I disappear during the summertime, that's where I go, OK? But the situation is a weird one, and I can't be out there that much. My name in California is not "Niven" or "Cammett." I've been asked to accept two names from two families, and it drives me crazy. I'm not going to tell you my other name, because there's no point. It's not that I don't love you, but to stay sane I have to keep things separate sometimes. I hope you understand." I was stunned into silence. The only thing I could think to say was, "OK. You know I've lived in tons of houses, had all kinds of step-parents too. I understand." "Not really, Adam. All your family are at least close at hand, and you don't have to have two names. Now, I feel better, so let's drop it." We did— the subject was momentarily dropped— but I never forgot after that, that Niven had a secret, and it was quietly tearing her apart. What gave her personality a center was that thing— love— the willful decision to love those close to her. Love made her whole. Yet the rents and tears I thought I knew only too well were even more exaggerated in her. The secret was safe with me— I never told— but for myself, a question mark was permanently added to Niven Cammett, about who she really was, and a sense of mystery. I learned then that people are difficult to get to know, even those you think you know well, even those you love. Every time we attached or detached, the mystery of Niven Cammett would grow more and more interesting, Niven herself more indecipherable. I would have to live with knowing her and not knowing her, too.

#49

The weekend nights we went ice skating at the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink, semi-adjacent to Elkins Park Square, also on Old York Road, weren't much for Ted and I: just something to do. Neither of us could ice skate that much. But there was a DJ playing good music over the PA, and taking requests, and a lot of Cheltenham kids hung out at the rink on weekends, so it was a chance to see and be seen. One uneventful ice skating night, I tumbled onto my ass as usual, and rose to see a girl, sitting in a clump of kids, on the bleachers, staring fixedly at me. My next pass, I got in a good look at her, and saw the spell was holding: she was still staring. She was a dirty blonde, thick-set build, with very full lips, a wide mouth, and wearing a dark green winter hat. I made up my mind: my next pass, I was going to stare as fixedly at her as she was at me. Ted was floating in the environs somewhere, and didn't know what was going on. So, here I came, looking at the girl in the green winter hat I'd never seen before, who seemed to want a piece of my action. I was close enough to make my presence known to her; we locked eyes; and what I saw in the delicate blue eyes was a sense of being startled, shocked into awareness somehow. Only, there was something so raw, so frank in them that I had to look away. My next, and final pass for the time being, the same thing happened. My eyes were startled, in an animal way, by how startled, how riveted her own eyes were, and I found myself unable to prolong contact. As Ted and I hung in the changing room, which had picnic tables and benches in it and doubled as a hang out space, I relayed to Ted, not without pride, what had happened. Ted was a reasonable, rather than a jealous type, but shy. So, the mysterious dirty blonde sat with her friends still, unmolested by us. Edward, our close acquaintance, a year older than us but kind, and conversant with almost everyone at the rink, was someone I could consult, so I did. I pointed her out, and he said, "Oh, that's Nicole. Do you know her?" "No, I was just curious. Thanks, Eddie." He chuckled, and left us alone, close acquaintanceship not guaranteeing me any more than that. I had wild hopes that Nicole would burst dramatically into the hang-out room with her friends, and perhaps propose marriage to me. When the gaggle of kids including Nicole, who had all been bleacher-hounding, left, they walked past us, down the steps and out. Nicole did not venture a final glance. For several months after that, I hoped Ted and I would see Nicole at the rink, but we did not. It was a lesson in the live-wire nature of desire, as it lives between people— how flames both begin to burn and are extinguished, out of nowhere, at the behest of forces no one really understands. Ted, that night, did his rounds, building a solid structure which would enable him to become a popular kid at CHS. I lit somebody on fire, but in such a way that all that could come from it was subsumed beneath implacable surfaces. Somewhere, I felt instinctively, was the key to the mystery I was looking for. Even if finding that key meant riding confusing, misleading, and/or agonizing waves.

#53

What the matrix structure of the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink held for us kiddies— as has been said, a place to see and be seen. Ted and I were sad to watch on the ice. But quirks emerged during our time there— the appearance of strange kids, and strange situations, from other places. Like Nicole. It wasn't long after Nicole that a new, mini-epoch began at the rink, based on the manifestation of another figurehead, (they said) from Abington. Josie was a pretty, lank-haired blonde with a semi-mottled complexion. Like Nicole, she liked to sit on the bleachers with her Abington buddies. Word reached us that, unlike Nicole, Josie was loose. If you could get her down the stairs, into the parking lot, over past the big misshapen rock which was rather uselessly placed between the rink and the back of Elkins Park Square, into the no-man's-land area where older kids liked to hang, anything might happen. I wanted a shot at Josie, too. As was de rigueur, Edward was our go-between. I had faith that he could power-broker anything. I called to him, on a night in March getting slightly too warm to still be at the rink, "Eddie, can I talk to you for a minute?" "What's up, Foley?" "Is this thing about that Josie girl from Abington really true?" "I don't know. I don't know her that well." "You know what people are saying." "Sure I do, but there's nothing too definite about what I've been told." I was losing him. I had already semi-crossed a line Edward had set in place about what you (whoever you were, and however he ranked you) were allowed to extort, as precious data, from him. I had to act fast. "I want to meet Josie, Eddie. Can you help me?" "C'mon, Foley. That stuff doesn't come cheap. Remember, I don't know you too well, either." Next gambit: "Alright, listen, Eddie. Didn't you say earlier that you have a paper to write for Langhorne?" He nodded. "I'll write it for you. If you'll introduce me to Josie, I'll write your Langhorne paper. You know I can." "Really, Foley?" "That's right, Eddie." "Alright, give me half an hour. I'll see what I can do." The half hour wait was an itchy one. Ted was on an unstoppable roll. He'd lined up an impressive array of conquests. Mostly guys, mostly about how he was going to be situated. I was neglecting to do that task, because it just wasn't in me to do it. Whatever was going to happen at CHS, I was ready to wing it. After ending the half hour with ten minutes of stumble-across-the-ice, I walked into the changing room to find Edward sitting there with Josie. "Josie, this is Adam Foley. Foley, call me tomorrow night, I'll give you the assignment." "You got it, Eddie." I got terrible stomach butterflies; I thought I might vomit. I thought meeting Josie would be an ebullient, light-on-it's-feet kind of production. Josie's vibe up close was very heavy. I mumbled a few random pleasantries. Josie said, "Are you OK? You seem a little tense." I was extremely tense. "No, just recovering from falling on my ass out there." "Do you want to go for a walk?" "OK." Down the stairs we went, out into the lot. "Here's what I'm going to help you with, Adam Foley. Here's what you need. You think you know who girls are— you think you know what girls want. This is not about us being friends or not friends. You sought me out, here I am, but I'm going to give you my diagnosis." We were behind the big stupid rock— none of the older kids was around. "Here— you get to kiss me one time, no tongue." As was incredible to me, I found myself momentarily lip-locked with Josie. A group of older kids, twenty yards away, behind Elkins Park Square, were moving towards us. The thing had to end very fast. The kiss was over. "Now, here's who you are. You're the guy who always sticks out like a sore thumb wherever you go. You're the one who wants to do everything your way. You think you're special. What I have to tell you is this— you are special, Adam, but in this world not everyone likes that. Your friend goes out of his way to make

himself not special. You need to learn from us— you can't always be exactly who you want. Eddie said, you're a year younger than us. When you get to where we are, you better understand that the more you stick out, the more you're a target. So, here's how you pay me back." We went over to Hillary's in the Square; I bought her an ice cream cone. She ate it quickly, standing in the Square. Then, she took my hand, led me back to the rink. Even before the top of the stairs, she disappeared into a group of Abington kids. Had I learned my lesson? Sort of. I associated being special with the magic of words and music. I wasn't a target yet, except maybe with Dad. Who knew? Now, I had an extra paper to write. I would try, for Eddie and Langhorne, to make it a special one.

The White Album (2009)

Back in the U.S.S.R.

They talk in hushed tones:
can't say a damned thing. Here,
we've had endless ineptness, but
at least we can say whatever
the fuck we want. Porn is
less than a mouse-click away,
Comedy Central has the best
news, Britney's publicly displayed
twat has gone in for heavy, fruit-
ful usage, we're maxed out
on credit card bliss. Complaints
are like air: legal, safe, unlimited.

Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da

Molly strips at The Office
in Center City Philly: high-
school dropout, pot-fiend,
child in second grade, puffed
up from downing lager during
down-time. She told me her
story because Desmond beats
the hell out of her, she needs
a better gig. Health insurance
does not exist for her or the kid,
she lives in fear of Italian Market
ruffians bearing down little Bradley.
I brought her back to my pad,
fucked her, told her I would gladly
be a father to Bradley if I had
the time, or the money, but I don't.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

For five hundred
years, they've said
the same thing:
these are the end
times, this is the
flood, the end of
things, apocalypse.
Funny how the
people talking
(including me)
never seem to
be the ones in
the street giving
food to the home
less. In fact, much
of this speech occurs
at meals, over grunts
of animal satisfaction.
You must be well
fed to pontificate:
I, like many others,
(hungry when full)
wonder what to do,
while my guitar
gently weeps, &
my life sleeps.

Happiness is a Warm Gun

I've been watching these two from my window,
but this is the first time I've seen them actually

do it. Look at his ass going up and down; tight,
actually, tighter than most guy's asses, and fast.

The way she just lies back and takes it, it's strange
if he doesn't notice how little she's enjoying this.

Plus, all he did was hitch up her hideous white
frilly skirt, yank off her pink panties, stick it in.

Her hair's still in a bun, so it's like watching a
librarian get raped. I think I can catch this if I

go fast enough. Onto the bed with me, skirt up,
panties off, away we go. How long this time (it

reminds me how many guys I need to call, and
what stupid idiots they are for not knowing what

the real power in the universe is, how it happens,
what the parts add up to, what matters down deep)?

Alright, he's starting to contract, I can see the little
quivers in his ass as he prepares (I appreciate this

more than his bitch does): bang! Wow, this guy
shoots like nobody's business, and I can feel her

parts squirm, hoping not to have to go through this
again. Back to the window: up, they're half-naked

on that hideous blue couch, smoking. He remains
unaware who holds the most space and who doesn't.

I win, as usual, and go off into space as I watch them.

Blackbird

Curtis Arboretum, Wyncote:
if you ramble through, quite
early, pre-dawn, there is a
slope on which you may hear
blackbirds sing (thirteen ways,
not really), for a moment
pretend you're Shelley, ecstasy
in the old sense (transcendence,
selflessness, not just pleasure)
manifests consciously.

Curtis Arboretum, Wyncote:
it says something that this
nocturnal vision hinges on
pretenses (that this is Albion
rather than a Philly burb),
because we do not associate
suburbs with ecstasy, old or
new (transcendence or joy),
the good reason for this
is that suburbs are a middle
realm, falling short of both
urban & pastoral essences.

Curtis Arboretum, Wyncote:
here is where Romanticism
ends: unbelievably, my cell
rang as I lay scoping the sun
rise. It was my friend in
Wisconsin, also scoping,
from an arboretum,
hearing a blackbird's song.
All I could think was this:
the blackbird would make
a great ring-tone for Sprint.

Revolution #9

At the Satellite coffeehouse Chomsky-ites have tattoos of Eastern symbols
(I-Ching, yin-yang, Buddha) all over their arms the screen-saver
for the computer is ImpeachBush.com while they sit huddled over pamphlets
printed on cheap paper put together at Kinko's about how to make bombs
overthrow the gov't grow hemp smoke hemp know hemp be hemp
or the way to join a food co-op that has exotic berries with anti-oxidants
& which has been going in West Philly since 1969 but these kids
were raised on indie punk and their bands only know a few chords
but everything about suffering and it comes out in songs like glass shards
no one has Health Insurance many have bikes get in accidents
get addicted to pills but no one much cares Health Insurance is for yuppies
what is wanted is a community anti-everything material goods
are derided in favor of principles but there is no public outlet to bring them
to the attention of the masses who are disdained anyway for not having
tattoos playing in punk bands reading Chomsky shopping at Mariposa
knowing what scum directs the media what polished, rehearsed scum
polished, rehearsed, privileged by luck and education to brainwash us with
imbecile illusions of happiness but these kids ain't happy either
they want something else what they can't admit to wanting a real voice,
real status real position real influence real opportunity
& it's not going to happen here at the Satellite so they sip brackish drinks
unsweetened by sugar give out their pamphlets promote their bands
find themselves at thirty borderline derelict addicted to Percosets
that they get through covert means which are unreliable some have canes
as if this were an old age home which it is as Shelley was aged by radicalism
unchecked by moderation emotional, psychological, or otherwise
so that it's the world against them and they ape contentment with this
scenario that sears its lines onto their foreheads oh the irony
that Penn is just a few blocks away where Chomsky went, and me
where real influence is possible owing to prestige and money
but don't call West Philly "University City" here you'll get spit on
because it's seen as a marketing ploy to destroy the Satellite
its espirit de corps atmosphere of huddled hairiness tattooed twists
wanton sex perverse reliance on self-medication & impending age
which reduces sangfroid to bitterness just like black coffee & black coffee
is what the Satellite does best Edith Piaf could sing a chanson
just for the Satellite only in triple time like a punk song everyone
would bow their heads, knowing truth knowing failure knowing
salvaging a life from radicalism is a scary venture not for sissies
or those who want Health Insurance to keep them alive

APPARITION POEMS (2010)

#1065

Black-shirted,
bright eyes in
dream-blues,
parents dead
of a car crash,
I kissed her so
long I felt as if
I would crash,
South Street
loud around
us, lips soft—

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

#1327

She said, you want Sister
Lovers, you son of a bitch,
pouted on a beige couch in
Plastic City, I said, I want
Sister Lovers, but I'm not
a son of a bitch, and I can
prove it (I drooled slightly),
took it out and we made
such spectacular love that
the couch turned blue from
our intensity, but I had to
wear a mask because I'd
been warned that this girl
was, herself, a son of a bitch—

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

#1488

liquor store, linoleum
floor, wine she chose
        was always deep red,
        dark, bitter aftertaste,
        unlike her bare torso,
                which has in it
                all that ever was
                of drunkenness—
to miss someone terribly,
to both still be in love, as
she severs things because
        she thinks she must—
        exquisite torture, it's
        a different bare torso,
(my own) that's incarnadine—

#1511

steps up to my flat, on
which we sat, tongues
flailed like fins, on sea
of you, not me, but we
thought (or I thought)
there'd be reprieve in
between yours, for us
to combine, you were
terribly vicious, this is
our end (here, amidst
I and I), does she even
remember this, obscure
island, lost in Atlantis?

#1514

You can't
get it when
you want it,
but when I
want it I get
it; she rolled
over on her
belly, which
was very full,
and slept; its
just shadows
on the wall, I
thought, dark.

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#555

Wood-floored bar on Rue St. Catharine—
you danced, I sat, soused as Herod,
sipped vodka tonic, endless bland
medley belting out of the jukebox—
you smiling, I occupied keeping you happy,
un-frazzled— suddenly sounds behind us,
the bar wasn't crowded & a patron
(rakish, whisker-flecked big mouth)
lifted a forefinger at beer-bellied
bartender bitching back, soon a real
fight, violence in quiet midnight,
I, scared, got you out of there

but you had to dance, you said,
had to dance so we paved Plateau, tense steps,
found nothing, you started crying & stamping
your feet like a child, I grabbed you & dragged
you back to our room you stripped, curled
into fetal position, beat your fists against
the mattress, in this way you danced
through the night, dozed & woke ready for more—

EQUATIONS (2011)

#1

Here's my equation: sex is more human than everything else. Let me put sex to the left of me and you to the right of me. In the interstices between me and sex, I have achieved my greatest consonance with humanity. In the interstices between me and you, I can (hopefully) give you a greater consonance with humanity, just by showing you the seams, the zippers, the ruffles, the cuffs, all the accoutrements that dress us up to be naked, in a text with its own nakedness. If I start with Marie, it is to show you her humanity so that you know why this was, for both of us, a fortunate fall. Marie had pale flesh. I am watching her; she is sitting on the little grass upwards-going slope behind the White Lodge, sipping a bottle of beer. Her straight, shoulder length black hair is parted in the middle. Then, a big open field with a peninsula of woods behind it; we're in the woods, making out. She wants to lie down amid the ferns, twigs, dirt, grass, and have it off. She's a teenager and I'm 22 and I'm freaked out, can't do it. So that I learn two kinds of hungriness can't always converge. Our bodies are slaves to different masters: duty, propriety to the right of us, impetuosity, passions to the left. When two hungers meet, they must negotiate. My hands go up her sleeveless, multi-colored blouse, but I'm going down the slope towards duty and right action.

#10

Heather is easily misinterpreted. She goes to bed with me for complex reasons: because she has pity for this underling artist, who tries so hard to be recognized; because this underling artist gives her treats (a public forum for her own underling art); because she finds him hard to resist after a few drinks; and because, lo and behold, she is genuinely aroused by what happens when these things are investigated. I don't have many interpretations of Heather; she's average height, average weight, a face more handsome than beguilingly pretty (sort of a WASP Frida Kahlo, heavy eyebrows, thick lips, dark hair that rides her head in waves). But what happens in bed is so climactic that it takes us beyond our self-serving interpretations. This is a woman who *gives*; every inch of her is covered in desire, which can (and must) be fulfilled. Heather likes sex more than any other woman I've slept with. She screams, bites, moans, and there is such a delicious fluidity to her movements that, despite her near-homeliness, I am moved to do the same thing. Heather is teaching me how rare it is to find a partner who loves these processes, who makes sex a manifestation of spiritual generosity. We're both almost thirty; I've never seen someone who contains both the generosity and the sense of comfort Heather has in the physical act.

#26

When I converse with N on the phone, in about my thirteenth year, our heads open up together, and we create an imaginative landscape out of nothing at all. Events around us, our classmates, notorious or boring or uproarious events of the days get used as fodder, parties, dances, and we hoist the whole rig up and sail it into the sky. We dance ourselves around our desire for each other: are we friends, or could we be more? When we broadcast together, other will sit and listen, spellbound. But to the left and to the right, even at thirteen, is the impulse to share our bodies as well as our souls and brains. N is conservative this way. She maintains a deep need to keep physicality light in and around her— she doesn't play sports, can't swim, is an excellent dancer but not a dab hand as a walker of city blocks, either. All her thoughts are of transcendentalizing past her own body, which is arrayed around her like marsh to wade through. The problem is a hold she wants to maintain over my emotions. We act, often, like newlyweds, but because she will not submit to me physically in any way, my emotions, unconsciously set at a skeptical angle, cannot cleave to her finally, like a ship docking in at a port. Sexual devotion often starts, I learn later, with the body, the physical mechanism. Our bodies are the primordial fact of who, and what we are. So, we talk on the phone for hours, imaginative leap follows imaginative leap, but imaginative leaps are not a basis for a man's devotion. Not that I'm aware of this at thirteen. All I know is that our brains are doing something intense together, and I like the feeling, but my soul craves a reality somewhere between us that cuts deeper, from sharper, starker angles, into a sense of achievement, conquest, victory, a permanent sense of marking and being marked. Later, it is Trish who brings all these algorithms together. She knows only too well what I am, and what I want. We imaginatively leap all over the cosmos together, hand in hand or separately, but the climax, the final imposition of the most profound shared imagination into the most profound imaginative leap, is back into our bodies and, when we are good together, out again, out into a re-entry of the cosmos, as a finality.

#27

Audrey, as a tangent to N, took the idea, not of broadcasting gossip but of sharing and disseminating literature, as a fait accompli move to establish romance, drama, suspense, and rich entanglement in her life. Prisoner of a rich background, and with a preacher for a father, she latched onto me as a purveyor of sweets for her, from my books to my looks to a sense of deference she wanted me to sometimes have as a way of demonstrating respect for her roots. The one determinative moment— we stood, with a crowd of poets, outside a bar in Andersonville, Chicago, as a night of festivities ended, and I was either going to pick her up somehow or not— ended in, for me, a practical response of denial. Her apartment was in an obscure neighborhood in Chicago, I was staying in the distant 'burb Palatine, and was due in Rockford the next afternoon. For Audrey, as she was later candid about, I was resisting something compelling in the universe which required that we spend the night together. She was heartbroken, with her Indiana-bred sense of being cornfed (blonde, voluptuous, clear complexion), and with the conviction she had that anything she wanted could always be hers. Rich equations suffer greatly from senses of entitlement, emanating from the rich, and dousing all that they touch with a glaze of non-recognition, of obliviousness. This was Audrey's contradiction— give her a text, available to be read at her leisure, incapable of vocalizing need or difference of any kind, and she could rise to the occasion brilliantly. Texts had a way of ejaculating into her brain and heart tissue, in a lovemaking routine (with the right text at the right time) extremely pleasurable for her. As I stood with her outside Moody's Pub, a flesh and blood entity— needy, morose, possibly surprising or disobedient the wrong way— turned her interest tempered with diffidence. This decided the night for us. Had we been ensconced together for several days, as I had been with Wendy, things might have been different. But when two possible lovers are too transient to each other, the magic spells don't work, incantations fall flat, and it is learned again that for equations to take on flesh in the world, there is no substitute for real, raw time.

#37

Bars work into sex equations; so does travel. When Wendy and I hook up in New England, we manifest not only guts and bravado, but glamor. We are transients there, doing what transients do. What I make with Kyra, who shares a large flat in the East Village with one of her also-fashionista friends, is even more gruesomely constructed. Kyra is John's sister. John and I are running the Philly Free School together. When we stop off to spend the day with Kyra in Manhattan, and then the night, I know instantly that (as is gruesome to admit I could be this crass) I can make a score here. Kyra is drastically, dramatically about charm, glamor, and intrigue. The raven-haired, buxom look she favors is pure Liz Taylor, skin slightly bronzed more than Liz, and, most importantly, a physiology which does not say (as most physiologies do) no instantly. All her postures, jests, glances suggest there is room in her. Yet with John to think of (this is his sister), the transient sucker punch into bed would depend on me being (as Wendy had been to her benefactors in New Hampshire) more brutish than usual. Decentered away from our personal norm, against a novel backdrop, in the middle of a period of expansion and growth, why shouldn't I be brutish? Now's the time. At a bar not far from her flat, John and I hold court. Here is Samantha, a friend of mine from the old Manhattan days. We flirt outrageously, too. I've got a girl on either side of me on an elegant sofa (Manhattan, more than Philly, favors sofas in bars). John is bemused. Punch-drunk on all the attention, I understand that Samantha lives too far away, in the recesses of Brooklyn. Tonight it must be Kyra, or no one. John is also high as a kite and more tolerant than most. When the three of us tumble drunkenly back into Kyra's apartment, the crunch comes. I'm either going to make a play to sequester myself in Kyra's room with Kyra or be more civil with John, and less pushy generally. Fortunately or unfortunately (and channeling, perhaps, Baudelaire's Good Devil), I feel the game within me, and have just the right concoction running through my veins to see it through to the end. A bar is a game; travel is a game, often, too; and when game-stakes are raised, you either rise to the occasion or you don't. The door is eventually shut on John, who can't not laugh (welcome to P.F.S., right?), and I am alone with Kyra. The night is hot, her room not air conditioned. We don't talk much. I find myself riding the game, pushing the river, and what happens is not masterful or revelatory, but adequate. The fashionista appurtenance items (mostly clothes to be debuted, turned in to authorities, or discarded), sounds of the East Village beneath us, even Marlboro Reds to smoke (not my usual brand), all coalesce into a sense that having started on one square on a game board (that's bar-talk), I've done a game version of a check-mate. I've been a Zen arrow into space the right way. Even as I am not unaware that deeper questions and resonances are being unanswered, and John has real reason to be annoyed. For the night, I am Kyra's appurtenance item and she mine. This inverts who I am with Trish and Jena, but once the action's over and Kyra's asleep, there's no way out. The equation is: you did it, and that's it.

#38

That first spring I spent in State College, Hope swept hopelessly away from my friends and I as a siren. With her pitch black hair, dark eye make-up, Cure shirts, she embodied the mystery of the Gothic, which was a countercultural subtext in the Nineties about outsider-ism, what it meant to subsist as a freak in the world. I didn't know what she would be like up close— as of August, and the fall semester starting, the dimensional angle hit me as hard as Hope did, who was not taking no for an answer, with any of us. The attitude, once you gained access to her room, was as pure Don Juana as it could be. When she, frankly, pulled off her panties and offered me her crotch, the heat of it made me swoon, so that I could only half-function. She was too bold, too blunt. All of her was fiercely dark, and the fade into her was to cleave to the darkness. Yet, the tactile thing, about lovemaking and sex and the right kinds of delicacy and the right blend or savior faire towards mixing seductiveness, aggression, and restraint, was beyond her. Hope wanted sex to manifest as a Gothic ideal, a stand taken for burrowing into each other's permanent, corrosive darkness. What two bodies are actually supposed to do to make sex a something pleasurable, was not a relevant reality, when all that black eyeliner spoke more. All of which meant that sex here fell down, past her sharp jaw-line, bulging eyes, and exotically wrought face, into a way of demonstrating rebellion, obstinacy against the normative, but also awkwardness between two bodies hardening and softening in and out of harmony with each other, with their own nudity, and with an attitude too militant, too fierce. I learned that, movies and other cultural talisman objects aside, real sex requires real tenderness, for men as well as women, and when tenderness goes missing, so, generally, does ecstasy.

#43

I learn from Trish the rules of intoxication. As you lift off, you leave behind everything in your consciousness that is tinged towards the mundane. Normal space/time dimensions need not apply; everything happens in a realm of perfected imbalance, expected surprise. Trish has lived with drug dealers; has spent years in circumstances extreme enough that ingesting hard chemicals becomes like brushing one's teeth. Trish does, in fact, find states of intoxication cleaner than sobriety. A sober mind dwells on hard facts; hard facts for Trish have no endurance. Trish wants every lover to be Lord Byron; every night to contain and perpetuate Greek-level dramas; and to be a heroine in such a world grants a crown of flame, of radiance, that Trish covets. But dramas demand conflicts; I learn that Trish will rock the boat for no other reason than this. There's always a solution sweet; but Trish enjoys the solution less than the problem. She wants to see me riled; there's always an impressive array of red flags at her disposal. When she does her seven-veiled dances, she can use her various highs to create a palpable ethereality. I never have any choice (once the drama has been set in motion) but to resolve the tension with a push into her, and a denouement involving another bowl, drink, pill. Consummate sensuality can have no reasonable end; it has to be pushed to its limits to be really tasted. This equation threatens to overtake my existence. They are a distraction from a shrewish reality— that the greatest escapists invariably have the most onerous obstacles and daunting responsibilities to escape from.

#45

Growing up with Emma, who had been in my class at CHS, wasn't like growing up with Roberta. It wasn't like anything. Emma, a lanky blonde with long, lank blonde hair, a chiseled, cat-like face, and long limbs, looked like a stunt double for Trish, and had been merely an acquaintance. She was quiet, and kept to herself. Her friends were among the geeks of the class. Why and how Emma knew to show up now, in the midst of all this turbulence with Trish, I have no idea, but she did. I laughed because she so resembled Trish, but I was also aroused. I liked the idea, past N and Roberta, of a real hook-up within my class, even ten years after the fact. She was there, at the Last Drop, on a succession of key summer days, in a sleeveless white blouse. After all these years, her cat-face grew on me as enchanting, compelling, suggestive of something her whole presence insinuated— she identified heavily with Trish, and had a female impulse to demarcate turf which could also be hers. Whether she'd been stalking us or just heard what was happening with us from the suburbs, I still don't know. I knew she was commuting to Center City from somewhere. What she wanted was just one night with me, I later concluded. When, on the one late afternoon I made my way with her back to Logan Square, we were ensconced, she took out a bottle of Robitussin as though it were an aperitif, and she were Trixie Belle. She wanted, as she said, a Robo-trip. It was part of the magic of that night that Emma wound up encapsulating for me so many different partners at once, including partners merely being anticipated. I found it easy to begin making love to her, because she made it easy. Her equation was interesting, about female levels of awareness— everything about her physiology screamed, you always wanted me the most, but you just didn't know it. You're a man— you don't know these things. I have delivered myself to you because you need me now, and I need you. Now you may begin to learn who you are. And we made love with great fluidity and rapidity, and then we made love again. Her fluidity was like Heather's would be, and the sense of being lulled into a trance of perpetual, high-intensity intercourse, on the bed, then on the living room floor, on the couch in the living room, from the front, from the back, was like Jena. We each gave the other a show-stopping performance, manifesting (as was odd, and as I was not too dumb and callow to notice) an inversion of our years of starving for each other. The absolute ecstasy of several mutual orgasms was the tactile insignia, as it might've been with Roberta and N, of an eternity of denial overcome. This, even as what was built into us both had been noticed only by her. Why, in sex equations, women usually hold the cards: women are receptive to sensory data on a deeper level than men, and have a primordial understanding of physiology, of bodies and more bodies, which men do not. When bodies speak, women listen more. Emma and I shared a home, but only she registered what our bodies shared, what was in them. When Trish showed up, it was a red flag from nature that it would be Emma's time to show up too. Even if it proved to be the cosmic design that after one night, I would never see Emma again.

#48

Jena has very specific, very naïve notions about love. Love is faith— you believe in someone else. But Jena's version of love presupposes a static sense of self, and an equally static sense of the Other. If you change, you must not change profoundly— there must be a continuous, coherent presence that subsists from one change to another. The conflict is that most mutual upwards movements change things (consciousness, emotional matter) irreparably. As soon as it becomes clear that this is what Jena's vision is (once the initial thrill of perpetual physical intercourse has subsided), I realize that nothing between us can coalesce. She barbs her remarks in such a way as to suggest that I'm not who she believed me to be— a simple, unchanging soul. As things burn down to the wire, I realize that Jena's ideals dictate that no one will ever exist for her except as a shadow of these ideals. She will project her ideals onto many, and see who mostly closely conforms to their striations. When I read through her letters many years later, I am stunned that I could've fooled her for as long as I did. But there's not much room for reality in human relationships and by the time I reread these letters, I have my own formulated ideals. What redeems me, in my own estimation, is the facticity of my awareness— that the idea of an actualized human ideal is fallacious, and that honesty consonance on this level has its own way of going up.

#53

I walk around my apartment, bottoming out. I'm not hungry enough to eat, too tired to sleep. Because right now I'm seeing *through* things, I know that Jade's entry into my life isn't such a big deal. She actively courts states of impermanence; everything she does is calculated not to last. All her relationships are posited along an axis of attraction/repulsion. But I have inherited enough of her hollowness that right now it doesn't matter. I gaze out the window at the SEPTA trains, wires, 30th Street Station off in the distance; I remember the eternal charm of action, movement, dynamism. When you get in a train, you transcend an entire life you leave behind. Yet every human life has to balance stasis and movement. It's something Trish never mastered— how to move and not move simultaneously. Trish demands absolutes— absolute movements, absolute stillness. I have learned that the only absolute in the universe is existence itself— something will always exist. I don't pretend to know how, or what, or why. I've left all the shot-glasses out; Jade forgot her cigarettes, American Spirits. I fish one out of her pack and light it.

#55

I have the challenge set out before me: to accept my own hollowness, as I watch Jade perform her daily tasks. There is a sense that I am watching a series of multiplications: first Jade is *this* person, then *that* person. All of this signifies that Jade sees my own multiplications when we touch. But if there is no stable center inhering in either of us, who are the two people that fuse their physical energies, in such a way that the world is briefly effaced? Multiplications can be taken two ways— as a destruction of stable centers, or the creation of variegated parts that form coherent wholes. Because Jade needs her drugs more than I do, I feel her desperate edge of a woman hovering above an abyss, a woman who cannot look down. I'm past the point of believing in myself as savior or personal Jesus; Jade must live with her crosses and bang through them on her own. My own cross is the vision of multiplications ending, simply because each ephemeral self expresses the same desires, tastes, fixations, and foibles. Jade and I can't give each other that much— Trish could never teach me this, because our basic, shared presumption was that nothing existed but what we could give each other. As I make love to Jade, there is a charity I feel towards her predicated on her own unacknowledged autonomy— that she has more than she thinks she has. If we persist without knowing yet what our equation is, I know that much of it has to do with shared charity, expressed in a context of basic and final separation and singularity.

#61

The crux of the matter is this: it's time for me to jump into some fray again. I'm restless: I know that what you gain in solitude has to be pushed out into the open for there to be some truth consonance, and these peregrinations are not enough. Jade has been bolstering my confidence; but I'm too old to just hit the bars and the clubs like I used to. So I'm poised to do something, I just don't know what yet. Like mathematics, human life has distinct compensations: there is always another equation to be formulated and parsed, a new slant, novel ways of perceiving realities that are leveled and layered to begin with. And, somewhere in the distance, a miracle always hovers: the promise of a few truly lived moments, in which every narcissistic schema is transcended in the sense that something is being given and received on both sides. If I didn't believe this, there would be no reason not to commit suicide, because I already feel I've done enough work for one life-time, and the growth of my seeds has been more than adequate. But because the deepest truths are social, it cannot be my life-path to give up on my own humanity, and everyone else's. I have claimed that these miracles usually transpire in a sexual context, but I have learned in writing this book that this does not have to be the case. Our greatest consonance with reality and humanity is expressed any time something moves in an upwards direction between ourselves and someone else; any equation involving legitimate ascension is one worth investigating.

CHELTENHAM (2012)

#261

Never one to cut corners about cutting
corners, you spun the Subaru into a rough
U-turn right in the middle of Old York Road
at midnight, scaring the shit out of this self-
declared "artist." The issue, as ever, was
nothing particular to celebrate. We could
only connect nothing with nothing in our
private suburban waste land. Here's where
the fun starts— I got out, motherfucker.
I made it. I say "I," and it works. But Old
York Road at midnight is still what it is.
I still have to live there the same way you do.

#412

Each thinks the other a lonesome reprobate.
That's what I guess when I see the picture.
It's Elkins Park Square on a cold spring night;
they're almost sitting on their hands. One
went up, as they say, one went down, but
you'll never hear a word of this is Cheltenham.
They can't gloat anymore, so they make an
art of obfuscation. That's why I seldom go
back. Elkins Park Square is scary at night.
There are ghosts by the ice skating rink.

#414

And out of this nexus, O sacred
scribe, came absolutely no one.
I don't know what you expected
to find here. This warm, safe,
comforting suburb has a smother
button by which souls are unraveled.
Who would know better than you?
Even if you're only in the back of
your mind asphyxiating. He looked
out the window— cars dashed by
on Limekiln Pike. What is it, he said,
are you dead or do you think you're Shakespeare?

#420

I.
The Junior Prom deposited me (and fifteen
others) on the floor of her basement. I could
barely see daylight at the time, and at three in
the morning I began to prowl. I was too scared
to turn on any lights. She emerged like a mermaid
from seaweed. I needed comfort, she enjoyed my
need. We had gone out— she was bitter. The whole
dialogue happened in shadows. No one was hooking
up in the other room, either. You spiteful little princess.

II.
Whether off the bathroom counter
or the back of your hand, darling,
your unusual vehemence that
winter night, cob-webbed by
half-real figures, was animated by an
unfair advantage, which stooges threw
at you to keep you loopy as you
died piece-meal. All I had
was incomprehensible fury and a
broken heart— when I hit the floor
at four, you were getting ready
to play fire-starter, opened
the little snifter, curled your finger
twice in the right direction; darkness—

Addendum: #420

The craftier angle to hear them: hover
in the doorway, in total darkness, hands
held behind your back. She takes a stand
against him in the shadows, as her lover
flails, barefoot on carpeting: jabs, another—

these two miserable adolescents, tokens
of the dirge that was this tepid Philly 'burb,
clown choruses pining for images, curbed
words replaced with scripts, minds unbroken
finally meeting ends in winter rain, soaking,

drenched with venom against the Solid.
What to look for: register his life-force
energies against hers, for the first course
her rhetoric takes against him, her stolid
defiance, sharply defined, against knowledge

that she's veered over into eerie wilderness.
It's true, the abyss laughs around her, & him,
but she's slightly more bound up in it, thinned,
bruised beneath surfaces to embrace the abyss,
all he needs is a caress given really, a kiss—

he won't get it. What he'll get is the meaning
of the surface she's chosen: bone, dust, webs.
Yet they stand exalted as they taste the dregs—
someone's watching elsewhere, & scheming.
Transmutation must happen, past dreaming—

that spirit, against the animal, is real in them.
The doorway is hinged to show you two souls—
unvarnished, electric, whether riddled with holes
or not, & love of a kind is being made, & gems.
The craftiest angle is not you, if you will, but them—

#1112

I.
"Fuck art let's dance"
only we didn't dance,
we fucked, and when
we fucked, it was like

dancing, and dancing
was like art, because
the climax was warm,
left us wanting more—

how can I know this
dancer from the dance?
Brain-brightening glance,
how tight the dance

was, and the sense that
pure peace forever was
where it had to end for
both of us, only your

version was me dead,
after I had permanently
died inside you like the
male spider always does—

II.
Pull me towards you—
woven color patterns
create waves beneath
us, tears buoy bodies

to a state beyond "one"
into meshed silk webs—
not every pull is gravitational—
as two spiders float upwards,

I say to you (as we multiply
beyond ourselves) "those
two are a bit much, their
sixteen legs making love"

#524

When he drives around Elkins Park in
the dead of night, he thinks, this is how
I like the human race— asleep. When three roads
fork at Myers, he goes down Mill Road.
By the time the car climbs Harrison Ave,
he has the thought that the sleeping human
race is the holy one. He pushes past the old
derelict high school on High School Rd, wonders
if its still haunted. It flashes on him: the day
he broke in, smack in the middle of the Nineties,
with buddies now long dead. He found a hammer,
stole it, never used it— it sat in his closet
until after graduation. He was smashed then, too.

#281

A small unframed painting
of a many-armed Bodhisattva
hangs over the bed where
you imagine us wrapped, rapt
I do not deny this rapture
I make no enlightened claims
I have no raft to float you
Hard as it is for you to
believe, no mastery came to
me when this thing happened
I have two arms, no more
I am only marginally sentient
I cannot save you or her
The painting is better than us
you're welcome to it

#158

A piece of road kill on the New Jersey Turnpike,
scuttling into the city to steal from the old West
Philly co-op, to cook lentils over a fire in woods
somewhere near the Pine Barrens, this woman
who deserted me for a man who could and has
brought her three things: no children, abject
poverty, and sterling marijuana. It's to be smoked as
no last resort but as a means of being so wired into
walking deadness that living out of an old Seleca
seems celestial as a canto of Byron's, perhaps the
one she used to recite to me— "tis' but a worthless
world to win or lose," and believe me, baby, you
don't know the half of it, but you're not listening,
you're stoned, you always were, oh the charm of you.

THE POSIT TRILOGY (2017)

Posit

I want
but that's
nothing new.

I posit
no boundary
between us.

I say you,
I know you,
I think so.

I know
what world
is worldly.

I know
how death
stays alive.

I never
enter third
person places.

I could
go on
forever.

To Bill Allegrezza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up
from a whirlpool
swirling down,
but sans belief
in signification.

"I" must say I
w/out knowing
how or why
this can happen
in language.

"I" must believe
in my own
existence,
droplets stopping
my mouth—

alone, derelict,
"I" must come back,
again, again,
'til this emptiness
is known, & shown.

Le Chat Noir

I pressed a frozen face
forward into an alley off
of Cedar St., herb blowing
bubbles (am I too high?) in

melting head I walked &
it was freezing & I walked
freezing into pitch (where's
the) blackness around a

cat leapt out & I almost
collapsed a black cat I
was panting & I almost
collapsed I swear from

the cold but look a cat
a black cat *le chat noir* oh no

Dracula's Bride

I married into blood &
broken necks, endless
anemic privation, but

no regret. You see,
hunger fills me. I like
vampire hours (no

sleep), a blood-vessel
pay-check, diabolical
companionship, tag-team

seductions, guileless
maidens about to
be drunk.

We know what sweetness
is in starvation. We've
found, satiety

is death's approval stamp.
If you crave, there is
room left in you. If

you want, you are a
work-in-progress—
being finished is

a cadaver's province.
Better to suck
whatever comes.

Manayunk Sky

Facades on Main Street have a lift
towards it, but the Manayunk sky
isn't there, a mirage, a conglomeration

of spent wishes for a better human future
which can never be lived in the blackened
glare of well-trodden pavement. Its

expanse argues loudly for the subaltern
and its accessibility, a superior up
is down, a superior blue is black,

a superior open is packed tight
into a closed linearity, night's deep
recess. Now, I take the trouble

to interrogate pavement, which
can only deny truths of not-surface, hotly.

To Augustine, after reading his "Confessions"

If you really did find
something or someone
immutable, freed from
torturous progress, I
can't say I don't believe—

If you came to rest
apart from the unworkable
aligned profoundly with
profundity's alignment,
congrats from a still point—

If I seem cynical,
catching your desperation
as tides confounded you,
I at least know your death,
its heft, text, all plumbed

by me, or someone else.

Absinthe

Situations which, to face properly, you
might want to experience a floating
sensation (as though you'd hit the ceiling)—

they've closed the Eris Temple on 52nd
and Cedar; if there were (as has been
suggested) corpses beneath the floor-

boards I didn't see them, nor did I notice
the imposed regime change five years ago
and, yes, I would've cared, but then I

remember, this is Philly, heavy on inversions
and abasements, situations you can and
cannot float over, and the syrup poured

over your efforts takes back what it gives,
towards justice, balance, deathly intoxication—

Tranny Dream

I find myself in bed with a woman
with a man's crotch, & find this
unacceptable, & so excuse myself
into an autumn evening in North
Philadelphia, looking for a train
station, finding more nudie bars.
I get trapped in an enclosed space
with a stripper, done with her work
for the night, who counsels me
against taking the train home, that
I can sleep with her backstage at
her bar. I push past, into the night
again, & am assailed on all sides.

Eris Temple

That night I got raped by a brunette
chanteuse, I lay on the linoleum floor
of the front room sans blanket, & thought

I could hack it among the raw subalterns
of the Eris Temple, who could never
include me in their ranks, owing to my

posh education; outside, on Cedar Street,
October gave a last breath of heat before
the homeless had to hit rock bottom again, &

as Natalie lay next to me I calculated
my chances of surviving at the dive bar
directly across from the Temple for the

length of a Jack & Coke, North Philly
concrete mixed into it like so many notes—

Dracula on Literature

You can't tell me
you don't feed on
the mysterious disappearance

of the need to do this—
that raw life & blood
would suffice to

satisfy, & gird you
against the grinding
towards sphere-music

you fancy you make.
I've lived a thousand
years among human

souls, all in need of
blood, little else, and
words are no blood

at all— what suffices
for such as you is
(as you say) a

simulacrum of blood,
with limited flow-
potential, & as such

I counsel you (if
you ask) to feed on
something more wholesome—

don't scoff— wholesome
is not relative
for the human species,

& your words are dirt,
feeding no one directly,
& those who feed are

suspect, chilled by
exposure to terminal
frosts, unable to bite

what might suffice in the end…

NEW POEMS

Architecture and Levitation

The subliminal nature of architecture—
demonstrating, for the human brain, what
space is, how it might be saturated, without always
obtruding upon our consciousness— as I
drove around King of Prussia on those
brooding semester breaks, a subtle sense of
enchantment grew, hinged to what my
future might hold, as one who writes. King
of Prussia Mall, Tower Records, random
commercial strips with record stores, restaurants,
even the bus station where I was claimed
at the inception of the break, were all planned &
executed to manifest a sense of levitation,
& left my brain somewhere in the world Other, forever—

Perfect

The poster of Monroe, dousing herself in
cologne, was you, yourself, again— had to
be perfect, as you said; as Jennifer was you,
yourself again, perfectly, as didn't need to
be said, couldn't have been anyway, then.
I imagine you, wandering down to that dank
basement, with a sense of symmetry in your
brain about what had been, would be. By
the time it was time, your hair had darkened,
but the core of you remained bright, as bright
as it had been in the house on South Atherton
Street. It was your turn to cut down the middle,
offer up your vision of perfection to a man who
appeared to you more than a curiosity— sharper.

The shock of making love amid a sea of paper,
piles upon piles— my own vision of perfection
had arrived, on the wings of the Symbolists, as
they were me, myself, again, etc. The space we
were able to inhabit that autumn, a from-here
armistice season against Hell, couldn't last, but
we didn't need it to. Rather, if we cut into each
other at the right angles, a fossil shell imprint
would be left on State College, & the whole world;
pungent, starkly ravishing enough to last our
own un-warped version of forever. So it has
been for me. As to where & what you cut down
the middle of, as we speak— we'll see if I'm
pure enough to know anymore, Emily. Maybe.

The Painter

The compact red book I ran around with:
Crowley's *Book of the Law*. I was goaded
into knowledge that a reckoning was at hand.
An archetypal Goddess had manifested as
a tactile reality in my life. An image had been
seared into my mind; a painting called *The Vessel*;
it was hers, and yet I was a married man. The only
path forward that tempestuous autumn of '01 was to
cheat. The book laid down a gauntlet of what
it meant to act in the world with a genuine sense
of destiny; to be a man who had the mettle to be
a real force of nature. She knew, my wife, that I
had been possessed, and that winds were blowing
me in a new direction, towards the forbidden.

I had, it seemed to me, no choice. The night I
spent with the painter, in a studio in PAFA, I
discovered what it meant to have a hinge to
true will about matters of the heart. She kept
paintings there, of Dionysus and Apollo, and she
would make me a myth, too. We shared red
wine that had the effect of being blood between
us; our chalice was the air, the sound of water
pipes late at night in an old building, darkened
corridors meant to hold only us, bathrooms
which could be used as portal-ways into starry
worlds. As I gathered steam, I felt the book
hover in the air as well, a piece of text writ in
boiling blood, pummeling towards spring.

The Studio

The vista which then opened was one I never
could've anticipated in the Nineties— the PAFA
campus was set as a series of jeweled buildings
smack in the center of Center City Philadelphia,
a few blocks from City Hall. Mary was then still
in enough good standing to maintain her own
studio on campus. I had to sign in as a guest on
the ground floor every time I visited. The room
was a large rectangle, and the elongated back wall
was one big window, looking out on the western
progression of Cherry Street, towards Broad. Until
Mary and Abby, I had no fixed notions of painting;
now, I dived in with the frisson of one let loose in
a wonderland. Everything about Mary was magical

to me, and the canvases arrayed around the studio,
largely male nudes, recumbent or not, plugged into
Mary's fascination with classical mythology, and made
a case for Mary as a Don Juana, a seducer of men.
Heady stuff, and often Mary's tales were about men
who had posed for her. Vertiginous, but I was on
the verge, nonetheless, of a full-on love affair, maybe
marriage, to a women powerful enough to be called
a *Creatrix*, a female goddess in the world, and I knew
it. Sleeping with Mary meant something it never could
with others; rather than a mere palliative, if you could
get her to put out in the studio, you were plugging into
a mythological web, glistening and intricate, stitching
yourself, possibly, into history, and the come was in colors—

Genius Loci

West Philly swung, night by night, around all of us.
I couldn't not notice— Diana was delicately gorgeous.
She spent lots of time in the room next door.
One night, deep into the wee hours, and as
the entire house tripped (taken off, it
seemed, into distant universes, sucked into
black holes, or even flipped the switch into
primordial ooze and chaos), I swung dumbly
into Kevin's open door, found Diana tripping
on the bed, in tee and panties. As I sat down
on the bed, all that occurred to me was to
follow my instincts. The *genius loci* of that
place and time was all about nothing else,
and the sense that Diana, whose elegant lashes

and sculpted cheekbones belied her wildness,
existed as an archetype I came to worship
at the shrine of, even as music roared from
down the wood-floored hall, Mary and Abby
slept on the other side. I ascertained, later,
Diana, who I hadn't known before, had changed
her name, to stake a claim, against missing other ladies'
fun. She would become an arriviste for me, later,
also, once the two stalwarts were out of the way.
Hopefully, foggy memories would make me hesitant
to claim knowledge, more than stunted, of her
bellicose, venom-bordered insides, of a stunted child,
Lolita as painted by Goya. Lolita painted by Goya,
however, is still Lolita. Nothing child-like in that wildness.

Crowned

The routine social maintenance of our domain—
another drunken night at McGlinchey's, eyes and ears
to the ground as usual, broken then only by your
arrival. It must've been Nick who met you first,
I don't remember, but I saw you were fixated on
him. Hannah: novelist, politico, of course, but looks which
teetered ambiguously into divisiveness for those
who knew you— heavy brows, wavy hair, tall, a bit
tomboyish, also, but articulate, a charmer, and yet I
registered the sense that if I ever got you, it would
be something gratuitous, a surprise, because closed
seemed to be the fortress, and choosing Nick seemed
to betray a masochistic streak. That night, his front
swelled visibly with your arrival— I stepped back.

You were, must've been, I later realized, underwater
somehow, surveying currents, examining the wildlife,
surreptitiously and invisibly carving a watery path to me.
I had only what the male of the species always has—
the equipment to complete your circuitry, potent or
impotent in any time or context, waiting latent to
take our moment, make it crescendo through the reef,
weed, rock, as though destined, written into ocean's
records an eternity ago, when all life dwelt in the ocean,
all encounters occurred in resplendent semi-darkness.
And all this still sitting with the gang at the Glinch,
holding your own with a bunch of macho punks, who
were taking something in Philadelphia by force, me
selected silently, the tomboy an Ocean Queen, crowned—

Undulant

I'd made plans to meet you in Bar Noir
on 18th; you were there; we drank. What
happened after that, in the Logan Square
flat, is that in defrocking you knocked over
an antique lamp bequeathed to me by my
aunt in Mahopac. Serendipity, I thought,
stunned then into silence by your bedroom
élan. Outside, a sultry night simmered; this
night of all nights, scattered green glass littered
my bedroom floor, and I finally got taken, past
liquor, to what eternity was only in your mouth—
as though you'd jumped from a forest scene
(ferns, redwoods), a world of pagan magic,
into a scene still undulant with possibilities—

Portal-ways

Was it through you, Abby, I managed to do
Queer Studies 101? Here's what I saw: you
aligned yourself with bad girls, to make yourself
look formidable, lived a life of intermittent
lassitude & discipline, tawny head bent down
to study coded missives you dared not decipher,
and then the bittersweet aftermath into postures
you earned for yourself. Girls in a row, a pretense
for an artist of your magnitude. Was that all
you had inside you? I wonder, but it's none of
my business, as the Neo-Classical portal-way
built into your brain hovers around the Earth
for a few centuries, and the paintings themselves
form a row, disciplined, formidable, coded, bittersweet—

Glass Doors

It isn't difficult for me to imagine why it might
be that, outward action done for the night, Abby
would stand outside Mary's glass-paneled,
completely curtained double doors, and listen to
us making love. All this time later, I see it as
a manifestation-in-action of *The Lost Twins*,
from Abby's own vaunted masterpiece, rising
to the surface of Abby's brain, and asserting their
presence. The male-leaning twin laughs at all
the pushing and grunting, the sleazy cheesiness
of what I have between my legs (she has one too),
as though I thought it made me big in the world
(it did not) to bang away at Mary as if the world
depended on it. The profound dumbness of sex

and sexual intercourse mixed with the pride of her
own phallic presence in the world, doing an even
more manly routine of being split, being two
people at once, and making both of them thrust
through the surface of human life, into art
taken from two places, willed into brilliant
singularity, in a way the grunting moron could
never understand. The male-leaning twin wins.
The real girl twin remains a coy maiden, building
up the guts to let herself into bed with me,
jealous of Mary's easy submissiveness, as though
to the manner born, of letting the man be the man,
however dumb, and riding the waves towards twin
peaks, rather than Lost Twins, behind glass doors.

Feast or Famine

I knew the Manhattan you grew up in well indeed—
the Upper West Side— gruesomely built of blocks
of primitive brick & stone. But, for you, with two
orchestra musician parents, a ticket into New York
Bohemia, bagels & lox from Zabar's, then nothing,
popcorn, then back to Zabar's. Whether feast or
famine, no forced schooling for you, just days at
home with paints and canvases, from a young
age, for company, hours of repetition, breakthroughs.
Always unease, that what you wanted to paint
was too formal, too advanced, for the land
of Warhol & Koons. You were ready for Philly.
PAFA, drugs, dykes, all in preparation for
finding it, your mind's precious Rosetta Stone.

Your vision grew limpid as your life went crazy—
ensconced in the Center City beau monde,
directing traffic, wedded to an Irish witch
who wished you the worst in the end, every
distillation of visual perfection in your brain
found refulgent form, as you found time to
fall into my arms as well, & I rode analogous waves—
why it was all lost then was simple— the girls,
your girls, didn't like it. They were threatened
by a genius they knew to be easily trounced.
I never let you go. I still won't: the halcyon
nights we spent remain the guiding light of
my life, in this world & beyond, you & Mary,
& bruises or afterthoughts be damned, Rosetta Stoned—

Javelins

for Jenny Kanzler

Artfully arranged arrows engorge hidden quivers
she carries, everywhere she goes. Each day registers
as a clarion call to the hunt. Javelins are squirreled
away for special hunt days. The self-generated mystique
of the girl warrior magus makes others nervous.
What makes it onto canvas— Spanish-colored visions
of child-like dilapidation, children blankly born into
the special dwarf dodo dance the human race does— takes,
transcendentalizes violence into a vision quest for the most
morose human truth, tripping eyes into realizations of
deep, absurd diminutions. This is a woman unused to
conventions, around that word (love) which cannot appear
in her paintings, themselves sharp like javelins. Her eyes
cannot be anything but green, but her carnivore streak is pure earth.

I cannot deign to speak of where, how, why she was raised,
except to say that what was needy in her crystallized as
her most precious asset. The child in her cannot die.
That the special circumstance is not a coincidence—
the analogous morose days I spent in Bethesda in my
own childhood, dragged unwillingly by those I
had no idea were adversaries into a matrix, corrupt
in its tininess, lying in all directions to cover up
stunted, blunt motives— can remain in the grave
where it belongs. It's all too sad. But transmuting
sadness into anger, anger into representational panache,
is what this Diana does best. She, too, would look
ravishing at the center of the Great Stair Hall.
And could laugh, here and there, at the whole thing. Between shots.

Cabinet

The painter's brain seeks the transcendental
in sensuality; once it's achieved, does the routine
maintenance work of holding it, conserving it,
memorizing it, filing it away in the special cabinet
for what makes human life, in all of its squalor,
worth living. It was taken for granted, when we
were good, that we could give each other such a life.
This marked place, I have a cabinet for, too.
The places are all marked: Logan Square, for one,
as the sunset appeared from bay windows; Liberty Place Towers
to the right, due south; the Franklin Institute due
north, courtyard full of curiosities. It is understood
that these are what make up your brain: colors,
forms, tableaus— a succession that was me for you, too.

Sultry nights in West Philadelphia were another
vocabulary for us— grass plots dotted the concrete
yard beneath your window, wood-paneled floor, wooden
dresser taking our tripped-out trysts, making them
rustic. A poet's brain transcendentalizes language &
philosophy— I always trusted as secure, what
started with you & sense. Grounded in sense,
right there on Baltimore Avenue, was an implicit
engagement with taking what was banal in
the script of our consciousness, shaking it loose.
It's all in my own cabinet now, about shock, spark.
No one ever gave me a better life— pathways
from sense to oversoul-level awareness, fastening
color to what could remain uncolored. Passions.

Frequencies

for Mary Walker Graham

I.

"We're at our most bestial when threatened not
with hatred but indifference; what our blood wants
is reaction of some kind." New Hampshire night,
our own reaction, you pliant, penetrable, laid out beneath me as
flies fidgeted our room, pirouetted moist air. Yet
we sank beneath bestiality to do just what indifferently
we wanted, beneath our glut of blood, so the summoned
beasts might react with this: ripped limb from limb,
buried in low-lying Virginia swamp marsh, given what
aphorism is only got in extinction, darling, as I quote
what you said at the bar before. In other words, they
hated us. The one-night stand wouldn't matter if your
brain didn't have the right words in it: stories, sequences,
slammed-down metaphors of a singed self. Frequencies.

II.

As the world between her legs tightened around
her, what she saw in bed with me was stark: okra,
stamens, roots, all that in nature coalesces in erect
growth; and a shadow father bent, then erect, then
bent again, perverse from amassing wealth in a world
whose submissiveness poisons him. Beneath the sultry,
wooded surface, what I saw was a semi-frightened
animal, along for an all-night ride (gruesomeness of
4 a.m. New Hampshire sun), knife thusly thrusting
into the backs of everyone around her, managing
to have stamina enough against constraint to take
what she was taking. The mattress thumped: above,
an angel was unable to conceal laughter, understanding
it was all in the script, including the garish sun's leer.

Butler Pike

The entropy, enervation of a recession—
consciousness rots, abraded by the obtrusiveness
of a dull, jagged populace— I stroll down
Butler Pike, snapping pictures of the houses,
and the buildings penetrate into my brain,
more than the people. Architecture is its
own phenomenological explosion, occupying
space inside/outside the mind, standing in now,
for better or for worse, for the people who
could occupy similar space— what I notice,
as sentience emanating from the buildings,
is that architecture is how the human race
expresses its relationship to nature. Here,
our choice is a sturdy yet ethereal harmony,

formidable, eerie, which foresees who might
occupy the houses, and yet chooses to manifest
the ornate over the plebeian, or merely practical.
When the ornate (the aesthetic) is set in place
in the Philadelphia suburbs, it is an expression,
also, of the region's apparitional vision, relation to
a wider world than even material nature; out
into physical space, into the cosmos, against
the restraining force of the earthly. So, in a
roundabout way, I get closer to the individuals
who have planned or charted the buildings
through allowing them (both) to seep into my brain.
Relationships, in recessional times, abstract
themselves— I stretch towards acceptance, gratitude.

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